132

# *What* POVERTY *in Porto Rico Means*

# WHAT POVERTY IN PORTO RICO MEANS

*By* Esther W. Buxton

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### Poverty in Porto Rico Means Starving Babies

Many are the subterfuges resorted to by the mothers among the poor to persuade the hungry little stomachs that they are getting something satisfying, and they are frequently successful; but the undernourished tissues are not so easily deceived; so from time to time there is brought to the day nursery a little skeleton of a baby whose mother has been feeding it water in which has been boiled a supposedly nutritious leaf instead of milk. One such baby lay motionless and apathetic in her hammock for months, while the exhausted frame was slowly responding to the regular and proper feedings which have made her the lively, happy, chuckling little youngster that she is to-day.

### Poverty in Porto Rico Means Insufficient Nourishment

for practically all of the laboring class, and for many others, refined and capable but of small means. A little codfish, a few mouthfuls of yautia, which resembles the potato but lacks its nutritive qualities, and coffee—that is the heavy meal of the day for hundreds. Sixty cents a day for a family of seven is what many of the country people have to live on, and ten cents of that goes for sugar. Fifty cents for all the other necessities of life is very close sailing even in

good times; a slight cut in such scanty remuneration, or destruction by hurricane of the bananas —the most largely used staple—and shipwreck in an apparently shoreless sea of semi-starvation and incapacity is inevitable.

## Poverty in Porto Rico Means Unsanitary Conditions and Ill Health

Shoes cost far too much to come within the range of possibility of a sixty-cent-a-day family —and the unshod are constantly menaced and attacked by hookworm, which is contracted from polluted soil, usually through the feet. Thanks to painstaking research, this disease can now be cured; but to how much avail, when the unprotected feet must go back to plod along over the same infected area? Mosquitoes are everywhere, disseminating countless diseases, among them the much-dreaded malaria, and elephantiasis, for whose victims amputation is the only hope. But a sixty-cent-a-day family has nothing to spend on nets or screens.

## Poverty in Porto Rico Means Lack of Opportunity to Advance

Many of the school children have no midday meal, consequently afternoon class work suffers to a marked degree. Moreover, in spite of an up-to-date school system, many of those who are dependent on the public schools fail to receive an adequate education for lack of room. These enter some poorly-paid occupation without sufficient training to make a successs even of that. Many of the girls and women know how to make just one kind of lace, and that not particularly well; not a very substantial foundation for an adequate livelihood!

## Poverty in Porto Rico Means Immorality

One room and a kitchen are all the house room the poorest can afford. The offer of even the meanest of houses for herself alone is a tremenddous temptation to a young girl brought up in such surroundings. The red light district of a town is likely to be a section of shabby houses, not much more than a roof and four walls, where are found those unfortunates who have forfeited their virtue in exchange for privacy.

## Poverty in Porto Rico Means Homelessness

There are very many young people, some mere children, who are literally on the street. Sometimes they live in unused hovels, bundles of filth and rags. Sometimes they drift from doorstep to doorstep and from patio to patio, night after night. Be it penetrating trade-wind or chill, drenching rain, they have no friendlier shelter than some covered porch on to which they can creep unnoticed at a late hour and from which they must go before anyone is astir in the morning. . . . . .

**For twenty odd years Christian social service has been carried on in Porto Rico. A tremendous amount has been accomplished; trends of thought have been entirely changed, but much remains to be done; so long as the sick, the weary, the helpless, and the lonely exist in such numbers, and in such neglect, so long will the social ministry of the Gospel be needed.**

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